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STATE FOR EAP/PD AND ECA

STATE PLEASE PASS TO DEPT OF EDUC - ROBIN GILCHRIST

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SUBJECT: Top U.S. and Japanese Education Officials See Eye to Eye on Importance of Educational Exchange

¶1. Summary: In a November 13 meeting, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, ECA State Assistant Secretary Dina Powell, and Japan's new Education

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Minister, Mr. Bunmei Ibuki agreed that educational exchange is essential in a globalized economy. The Minister also expressed great admiration for the Fulbright program, saying that such international exchange programs represent a key diplomatic strategy for influencing the developing perceptions of nascent leaders. He noted that Japan would like to see more American students coming to Japan to study in local universities. The Minister bemoaned the challenges the new Abe administration faces in pushing through much needed educational reforms since any changes, including allowing for the fostering of patriotism in Japanese schools, require amending the Basic Education Law passed in the postwar period. End Summary.

¶2. While in Japan leading a delegation of U.S. university presidents, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and ECA Assistant Secretary Dina Powell paid a November 13 courtesy call on Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Mr. Bunmei Ibuki. Ambassador Schieffer joined the meeting, which also included the MEXT Director General for International Affairs, Mr. Kenji Seyama, and the Director for International Affairs, Mr. Kazuo Watanabe. Both sides also agreed on the importance of foreign language study and the need for both the public and private sectors to support exchange programs.

Importance of Student Exchange

¶3. Minister Ibuki joked that he would like to see more Americans studying in Japan since right now the U.S. had a trade surplus in this area. Sec. Spellings explained that ensuring exchanges are two-way was one of the USG's main goals. She went on to explain that new economic conditions necessitate the development of human capital and the pursuit of lifelong learning, which is why the delegation she is leading represents the various types of American institutions of higher learning, including community colleges. She also stated that another goal of her visit was to correct the misperception that U.S. student visas are difficult to obtain, underscoring that the current issuance rate

is more than 99 percent. In response to Minister Ibuki's question regarding whether she would be meeting with Japanese students, Secretary Spellings explained that she would be giving a speech at Waseda University following this meeting.

Exchanges Tool of Diplomatic Strategy but Funding Critical

¶4. Minister Ibuki pointed to examples of world leaders developing a deep affinity for certain countries as a result of their study abroad experience, going so far as to call educational exchange a type of diplomatic strategy. He expressed great admiration for the Fulbright program and the important role it has played in Japan. Both Sec. Spellings and A/S Powell thanked Japan for its support and the work of the binational commission here. A/S Powell mentioned the new International Fulbright Science and Technology Award involving graduate study and work study opportunities in U.S. institutions in certain key S&T and engineering fields, adding that the U.S. would be extremely pleased if Japanese students applied. Sec. Spellings also emphasized the role of business, pointing to a longstanding partnership between Ohio State University and Honda. She explained that the U.S. delegation would be taking part in a luncheon program at the American Chamber of Commerce Japan to highlight the importance of business involvement in education. Minister Ibuki replied that because of the strengths of the American educational sector, the number of Japanese students in the U.S. is likely to rise, particularly as more Japanese firms chose to send their employees to the U.S.

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Overcoming the Language Barrier is Critical

¶5. Both sides agreed that foreign language study was critical. Sec. Spellings explained she was seeking funding for the National Security Language Initiative she had mentioned earlier. She lauded the work of Japanese firms such as Nintendo, which were using technology in new ways to facilitate language study. The Minister responded that Japan puts great emphasis on the mastery of English speaking among Japanese students.

The Challenge of Educational Reform

¶6. Minister Ibuki ended the meeting by highlighting that the work Prime Minister Abe had asked him to take on presented formidable challenges, particularly since many reforms would require revisions to the Basic Education Law of 1947. One such change sought by the Prime Minister's party would allow the schools to foster patriotism, which has been banned since the law was passed in the postwar period. The Minister elaborated that a decision would soon need to be made regarding whether the proposed revisions should be sent to the House of Councilors before December 15 when the budget process begins.

¶7. Delegation:

United States:

-Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings
-Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Dinah Habib Powell
-Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer
-Note taker, Margot Carrington, U.S. Embassy Tokyo

-Interpreter, Yoko Yamamoto, U.S. Embassy Tokyo
(Although we were asked to supply an interpreter,
Minister Ibuki conducted the meeting entirely in
English)

¶8. This cable has been cleared by Secretary Spellings
and ECA Assistant Secretary Powell.

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